

Facts About Colon Cancer

Colorectal cancer is a disease in which malignant (cancer) cells form in the tissues of the large intestine and rectum. Colorectal cancer affects approximately 6 percent of the total population in the United States. It is the third most common type of cancer and the second leading cause of cancer-related death.

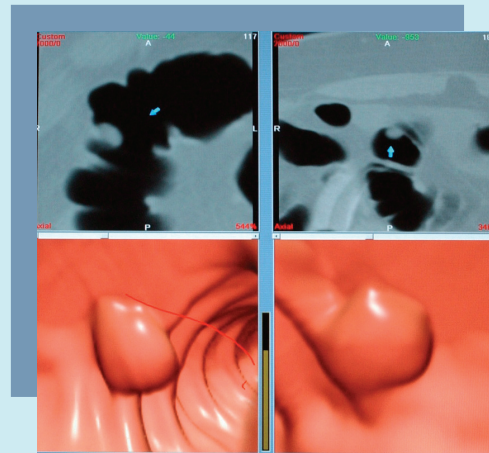
Screening and detection are the keys to prevent death from colon cancer. Colorectal cancer can be cured if detected in the early stages, and it can actually be prevented through early detection and removal of pre-cancerous and cancerous growths called polyps.

There are many different ways to screen and diagnose colorectal cancer. Some of the conventional methods include:

- Flexible Sigmoidoscopy
- Barium Enema
- Colonoscopy

Virtual Colonoscopy (VC)

VC is the newest technology to screen for and diagnose colon and bowel disease. VC uses x-rays and computers to produce two-and three-dimensional images of the colon and is performed with Computed Tomography (CT), a non-invasive procedure, also known as a CAT scan.



Polyp as seen on Virtual Colonoscopy.

Colorectal Cancer Service at NNMC

The Colon Health Initiative in the Gastroenterology Clinic at NNMC offers a full range of patient services for the management of colorectal cancer. An integrated clinical approach is coordinated with the Departments of Surgery, Oncology, and Radiology.

There are some significant differences between conventional Colonoscopy (OC) and Virtual Colonoscopy (VC), but both procedures can be performed in 10-30 minutes.



- Sedation is required for OC, therefore very little discomfort is felt during the procedure, but with a VC procedure you may experience some discomfort due to the retention of air.
- Due to the sedation medication, OC procedures usually require 30 minutes to 2 hours recovery time, while VC procedures require no recovery time.
- Because VC is a radiologic exam, any movement or motion from breathing may interfere with the accuracy of the exam.



- If a polyp is found during a VC procedure, a follow-up colonoscopy is necessary to remove the polyp, but with an OC procedure, polyps can be removed at the same time.
- Although VC is a non-invasive procedure, a colon preparation similar to that required for OC including Dulcolax, Fleets phosphosoda and oral contrast agents is used.
- During a VC procedure you are exposed to a small amount of radiation. Since the procedure is non-invasive, there is no risk of colon perforation.
- There is no exposure to radiation during an OC procedure, but approximately 3 in 1,000-10,000 patients experience complications due to perforation.



Please see reverse for important information regarding a Special Research Study.



A Special Research Study

The Initiative is currently conducting a study to evaluate the accuracy of VC for polyp detection. This study will compare VC to conventional colonoscopy for the detection of cancer, polyps, or other abnormalities.

If you wish to participate in NNMC's Virtual Colonoscopy Study, please visit your Primary Care Manager to request a referral.



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You MAY BE ELIGIBLE to participate in the Virtual Colonoscopy Study at NNMC if you meet the following criteria:

1. You are a TRICARE Prime beneficiary between 50 and 79 years of age in general good health,
2. You DO NOT have a previous history of colorectal cancer in your immediate family (parents, siblings and children), and
3. You DO NOT fall into any of the categories listed below:
 - Have a history of adenomatous (precancerous) polyps, colorectal cancer, inflammatory bowel disease, hereditary nonpolyposis colorectal cancer syndrome, or polyposis syndrome.
 - Have a history of severe heart, liver or kidney condition.
 - Have a history of bleeding disorders.
 - Currently pregnant
 - Have had a colonoscopy within the previous ten years, or a normal barium enema or flexible sigmoidoscopy within the previous five years.

Participants will be asked to undergo both a virtual colonoscopy (first) and, depending on the results, a conventional optical colonoscopy, either on the same day, or within a five-year period.

The radiologist reading your VC will determine whether or not you require an immediate conventional colonoscopy in order to remove polyps. In addition, some patients who may not require an immediate conventional colonoscopy will be randomly selected to receive a conventional colonoscopy for the purpose of the study.

Thanks in large part to the combined efforts of Senator Ted Stevens (R-Alaska) and Representative John P. Murtha (D-Pennsylvania), the Colon Health Initiative was created in 2003 at the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, MD. The mission of the Initiative is to create a premier model colon cancer center providing colon cancer screening to all eligible TRICARE beneficiaries utilizing proven and emerging technologies for the primary prevention and early detection and intervention of colon cancer, and to continue pioneering research in this field.

For more information contact:
The Colon Health Initiative at
(301) 319-8876

Or visit us on the NNMC website at:
www.bethesda.med.navy.mil
Type in Keywords: Colon

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